

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Called to Service"  
Dr. J. Dent

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I hope you have been able to take some time this summer to reflect on what is important to you. Sometimes the most difficult thing to do is actually take the time to enjoy your life, reflect upon what you are most thankful for, and take time to "smell the roses." Of course, unless you buy cut roses, you can't smell the roses in any other season here besides Summer and into the Fall. But even then, most of us don't take the time even to enjoy the ones at the front of the church. You have to take a moment and enjoy the brightness of the petunia colours as well.

Many of us enjoy our gardens, even during the dreariest of summers, we take heart in seeing the little seeds and plants grow into something, whether it be colourful or edible, something we can enjoy. Beet greens that bring a pink tint to other cooked vegetables. Cabbage greens that have a unique sweet flavour. All these parts of our gardens speak to what attracts us to life. What attracts you to life? Is it the sights, or the sounds, or the smells, or the touch or the tastes of life that attract you to what God made most pleasurable to human experience?

What we don't take much time to think about is what attracts us to life. We do spend a great deal of time on things that weary us, disgust us, displease us; but when it comes to what attracts us, we may have more difficulty describing what we love about our lives. As an act of praise today, take some time to put into words what you love about your life. Then give thanks. This is a biblical mandate, not just me giving you an exercise, so go ahead and enjoy it. "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

When it comes to Moses we don't know what he was thinking about in the desert, or more accurately on the edge of the desert, with his sheep. A shepherd has a little time to think about life, even write some songs, as David did. But Moses may have been thinking about his former life in the Egyptian royal court, where he would have learned the arts and sciences of the day, the engineering that went into the magnificent Egyptian building projects, the arts and culture, sculpture, painting, etc. He may have thought a lot about his rejection by his own people when he thought he was being

their champion. He may thought a lot about the murder he committed in the heat of the moment. We don't really know what Moses thought about on the edge of the desert, tending his sheep. We know he was there in a new, quieter life with a wife and two sons. The royal court of Egypt was far away and that life must have seemed like a dream.

Then one day he sees an unusual sight. He was probably fairly well acquainted with the various plants and bushes in which he moved his animals day in and day out. He knew the colours of the seasons. He knew the plants that might cause injury to the sheep, and would steer them clear of these as best he could. But this plant was on fire. Yet it would not burn out. It would simply keep burning as if some oil were feeding it, and the oil was not exhausted.

Now the liberal scholars will say Moses simply saw a desiduous bush with a deep red colour that he had never seen before. But this is hardly convincing. He might have seen such a thing and moved on. But this was more than that. This was a flame. And we can imagine him moving closer and closer to the bush on fire. And just about as he was about to touch the flame, he hears his name. God calls out to him, just as God calls out to you and I. He calls us by name, if we would be still enough to listen. It's hard to be still. Our attention takes us here and there and everywhere. Our fears and anxieties focus our minds away from God. But God still speaks.

In Moses' case, God gives a little context for why he put the burning bush in his way. You did note that Moses had to turn off his regular route and routine to be able to consider the bush. So do we. And when he does, God tells him that he has been hearing his people pray for a deliverer. God also tells him that he knows about their suffering. God knows how we are suffering, you and I. He has a plan for us, that involves us. We have a deliverer in Jesus Christ. We have a peace and a healing balm. Sometimes it is hard to receive that peace and healing. But as we listen, as we grieve our losses, as we go about our day to day business, God speaks. He tells us he does love us, he does want our best, he will use us to be an influence for good in this difficult world. But we need to receive the love, the peace and the care we need. As we are quiet enough to do so, we can also begin to give it away.

Now you and I know how Moses responded to God. He responded as many of us respond to God. First, he lists his disqualifications. Who am I? He

must have been thinking or at least wondering if his picture was still in the post office for murder. Second, he lists his fears. Who are you, God? How can I prove it is you to these people? These are the same ones who said to me, "Who made you a prince over our people?" He instinctively knew that the people would probably not follow him. Leaders constantly have these fears. What if I lead into a future where no one wants to follow me? What if it is too hard, or too expensive, or if there are disagreements? What then? So those are Moses' fears. What are your fears?

Moses then makes his third point, conceding that God has made his points. That is the simple fact that he does not want to do it. He does not want to serve these people who have cried out to God. He asks God to send his brother Aaron. And although this angers God, nevertheless, God agrees to send his brother as his spokesman. But God does not let Moses off the hook of being his main servant, the leader of this liberation that is about to happen. God keeps telling Moses that it is God who will perform the miracles, accomplish the impossible and follow through on making Moses' calling to service a victory rather than a defeat. And so God does with us.

We too can list our disqualifications for serving God, whether it is in our family, in our background, our work context, our flaws, our sins, our independence, our rebellion, whatever we can come up with in our minds. God certainly will say, I know this about you yet I love you. I will be with you through the toughest times. I will be with you during the best times. I will be with you even when you don't know that I am with you.

God's call to service is gentle but firm. We are to represent Him wherever we go. We are to be unashamed about the relationship with have with Him. Even if we are doubting, and wondering, as Moses was, we are to be truthful with Him and one another. At that bush in or near the desert, we find God, but we also find ourselves. It is there that we recognize God can use any old bush, and He certainly can use you, and me. We have a choice, we can pretend that we don't know God so as to not offend. But that is not the authentic way we are charged to be. For we too can be burning for God, passionate for God's ways, truth, love, and compassion. And we don't have to burn out in so doing. Many Presbyterian churches around the world use the burning bush as their symbol. They use a latin phrase as their motto. "Nec tamen consumebatur" is the latin phrase paraphrasing the Vulgate Latin translation of the Bible in Exodus 3:3, that the bush was burning but not consumed. Or my preferred personal translation, the bush was "not yet

burnt out.” Just like me. There are times when I don't think I can go on. Too much pain. Too much discouragement. Overwhelming need. Overwhelming loss.

I turn back to God and utter the words Peter spoke after Jesus had seen people leaving him because he had said something that had offended them. Peter said, “Lord, you have the words of eternal life, where else can I go?” (John 6:66-68) Or Job who reflects on all he has gone through and says, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21)

When we come to serve, it is hard to face that service, not knowing how it will be received. I personally find it hard to know when I have done my best, when I have given my all. I am hard on myself in some ways. Yet God is with me. And He is with you, all of you who have given yourselves to Him.

So as we come into another year of service here at St. David's, let us once again consider how we will serve. This is about receiving as much as giving. This is about learning as much or more than teaching. As we place ourselves to listen to God once again, let us invite ourselves and others to this most intimate relationship with God.

Let us pray.